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FAST-DAY

SERMON,

DELIVERED BEFORE THE UNITED

CONGREGATIONAL AND BAPTIST SOCIETIES,

BY

REV. EDWIN S. BEARD.

AT

Warren, Me., April 20, 1865.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

ROCKLAND:
JOHN PORTER & CO., PRINTERS.
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FAST-DAY SERMON.

TEXT—1 Chron. 29 chap., 11 to 13th verses inclusive: "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in heaven and in the earth are thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

I will not explain my text; its mere announcement is its own elucidation. I will come right to the heart of my subject, and mention the causes, we, as citizens of this nation, have for thanksgiving to God to-day. And, in the first place, we ought to thank God that we have a government. A large and powerful host of our own fellow-citizens rose up against us, for the purpose of destroying our institutions, or at the least, of perpetuating and establishing those of their own, foreign to the genius and spirit of our National union. This design was one that was cherished for a generation of men, and in furtherance of it, plans were matured, and studied preparations made in secret. This plot to ruin a country, whose policy they could not control, was so adroitly concealed, that it was not discovered till it was wholly perfected. This want of discernment on the part of the American people, was not owing to stupidity. It was not thought possible, that men could be found in this enlightened age, infamous enough to seek to destroy the wisest and most beneficent government on which the sun shone, and neither our rulers, chief men, or the masses of the people would have entertained for a moment the suspicion, that those of our own flesh and blood would betray and slay us. What was unsuspected was unprovided for. Arrangements for the dissolution of the Union were fully completed, before the people were aware that the first step had been taken. Those, on whom were bestowed the highest honors, in the gift of the people, took advantage of the confidence reposed in them, by scheming for the extinction of the nation's life. Under the cover of a purpose of guarding more firmly the bulwarks of our land, they

secured the possession and control of our arsenals and forts, in order that they might inaugurate their contemplated rebellion with the fairest promises of success. Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in Ascalon, lest the lost spirits of despair should triumph. Yes, children nursed with tenderest care, snatch the assassin's knife to pierce the heart of the mother! It is a high compliment to the genius of our Christianity, that the vast body of the people were so pervaded with that charity, which thinketh no evil, that they could not conceive traitorous sentiments possible to any considerable number of American citizens, especially those of broadest culture and intellect. The public, unprepared in mind for such developments, had erected no safeguards against their outward manifestations.—The war was commenced on the part of our opponents, with most decided auguries of victory. They had an organized army. We had none. Ammunition and arms were with them, and those of the best quality. They had a military character as a natural inheritance, vastly improved by a training which superior leisure allowed them in diverse ways. They had, also, the advantage of fighting on their own ground; in their own territory, which placed them in the attitude of defence, with all interior lines of communication at command. Though ostensibly the war was waged for self-protection, its real intent and purpose was to dethrone the established law and order of things and substitute in their place a Confederation of States, whose magisterial influence should be given to the support of an aristocracy. With all these prestiges of success, they have miserably failed. Thank God for this. The government which our Fathers founded, still stands,—its foundations all the stronger for this test of its strength. The Sun of the Union still stands, full-orbed, in mid-heavens, there to remain, and only the brighter to shine till the day of doom. Not a star is erased from the National banner, not a stripe is polluted. Glory to God for this! Hallelujah! hallujah! Amen! Amen! Blessed be thou, Lord God of battles, forever and ever! Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heaven and in the earth are thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art

exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But, to be more specific, we thank God for the vindication of the nation's honor, in the establishment of constitutional liberty. And, in order that the motives for gratitude may press with greatest weight upon us, let us attempt some analysis of it. Institutional self-governments are of modern origin. Previous to the establishment of ours, all had failed. Our wise and great men, searching out the hidden causes of their decline and decay, and perceiving that the ruin of these republics could not be rightly attributed to unsoundness of principle; but to defects in the character of the people, were incited to lay again on these old foundations, with a thoughtful provision incorporating on the body politic institutions which should secure that individual development, the lack of which had made free government hitherto impossible. Constitutional monarchies secured all the main checks and guarantees of personal freedom; but the Puritans sought to infuse elements in American liberty yet unattained. The trial by jury, the representative government, the common law, self-taxation, the submission of the army to the legislature, were all features of English liberty. To American liberty there was added the features of a federal republic, separation of Church and State, more individual responsibility, greater freedom of action. To secure this broader personal liberty, our Fathers formed the Constitution of the United States. This Constitution, embodying our common sentiments respecting the rights and liberties of man, was the bond of the federal Union. To renounce allegiance to this, from the very nature of the case, was disorganizing, and if persisted in, would end in its dissolution. And what did dissolution of the Union imply? Here we were, substantially one people, exulting in the name, American —prouder of that than of any other designation. We were a happy family of States, with local self-governments, yet revolving around our national, representative government as one common centre. This consolidation of power gave security to our

commerce, protection to all those employments that ennoble and dignify man, permanence to our institutions of learning, freedom from national bankruptcy, facility of communication between different sections, means of defence against foreign foes. All the arts that enrich and beautify life were fostered and encouraged; the light of science cast its illumination over the land, making its beneficent influence felt in the cottages of the poor, as well as the mansions of the rich. The amplest opportunity was offered to the humblest to aspire to all of which humanity was capable, or should be. Upon all this busy industry and varied pursuit, religion poured its mellowing and chastening light, linking us in the bonds of an universal brotherhood.

I, as giving expression to your feelings, would rejoice that this prosperous scene, for a brief interregnum interrupted, is to be continued; yes, more than this, there are to be added touches of beauty by the Great Limner's hand. The fate of civilization, of humanity, of religion, were all involved in the preservation of the Union. Not only were the hopes and liberties of the American nation at stake, but those of all mankind. Here was the question being settled—whether men were capable of self-government, and yet be subject to government. The question was being decided whether government was a boon to the people, or a boon granted by the people; whether the people were made for the government, or the government for the people. To state the issue tersely, and all comprehensively—whether *man* is *man* however low in the social scale, entrusted by God with destinies and responsibilities, both for this world, and the world to come, for the fulfilment of which the law of his nature teaches him there shall be no interferance on the part of the government, or any class with select privileges, or the masses of the people.

According to the ancient idea of liberty in republics, the highest idea of humanity was reached in citizenship. But in the broad light of Christianity, a man reaches his full development, only when he stands erect in the majesty of a complete manhood. Such a glorious result cannot be reached, except one is untrammelled and unshackled in every course of action to which his taste and genius incline, and his God invites him.

For the attainment of this, Government is but the means to an end. Every man should be free to act well his part in life; be summoned to all the privileges and immunities of political life, and be held in equal honor with every other man. It is a narrow view of this contest, to consider it, simply as deciding whether African slavery should live and reign, or die on this continent. The grand conflict of the past four years has been a contest between aristocracy and democracy. Shall the governing body be a few men, who, by birth and fortune, judge themselves the best men in the State to control its affairs, or shall all who are governed have equal responsibility and share in the government? This was the issue proposed by our opponents. Speaking loosely, we may with somewhat of propriety, designate the struggle as one between freedom and slavery. Nevertheless, the fact that the South were slaveholders, was a merely incidental truth in the struggle. But as an aristocracy could not maintain itself in this country without the ownership of human beings as a basis, the contest of aristocracy or no aristocracy became, under the guiding hand of Providence, (who led us in a way we knew not,) a contention on the part of the southern portion of the country for the establishment and perpetuation of the slave system. On the part of the North, it was a struggle for the self-preservation of the nation. And here again, the salvation of the Union was the life of freedom. God has so over-ruled affairs, as to bring about the highest wishes of the philanthropist. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good will to men!

I am now prepared for my second cause of rejoicing—which, no doubt, you have already anticipated—viz: the removal of the curse of slavery from our fair land; but on this topic, my friends, I find the emotions swelling the heart too big for utterance. Words are tame expressions of the bounding feelings of joy. For this result, for long and weary years, I have prayed. In early youth my daily prayer was "How long shall the oppressor triumph." How did my little heart burst with indignation at him who could take pleasure in binding a man in chains. My generous impulses, when yet a boy, drew my heart out in sympathy with that hated and despised, but now univers-

ally honored class, the Abolitionists. When I heard men rise up to the noble independence to declare that they would not vote for a slaveholder, I longed to be a man, that I might rise to the sublimity of such moral heroism. My moral instincts were pure, as God gave them. The moral sense of every child is shocked and outraged at the idea of slavery. I felt for the slave whose back was imaged forth before me, stained with scars and blood. I wept over him. As I saw, in imagination, families sundered, fathers from children, husband from wife, brothers from sisters, my sympathies were stretched to the intensest bearing. As I beheld pure and lovely woman with no crime but a skin not colored like her master's, dragged beneath the chariot wheels of lust, I cried unto God for vengeance and recompense. As I drank in the light of knowledge as free as air, and saw it falling on all around with saving, cheering power, how saddened became the soul as the eye wandered down the Southern horizon, to see the night of ignorance settling down on four millions of human beings, endowed with the same rights and liberties as myself, and heirs with me of the same immortal destiny. To see a man a mere beast of burden, his mind all undeveloped, uncared for, and every attempt at self-improvement met with the lash, even the light of everlasting truth shut out from it, (which would have made his burdensome life tolerable, inasmuch as it would have revealed the land where the prisoners rest together, and hear not the voice of the oppressor, and where the servant is free from his master,) was a pitiable sight indeed. With the culture of the intellect deemed a crime, the reading of God's word a fault to be severely punished, what could the life of the slave be but a living death? My heart yearned toward the outcast, and him that had no helper; and I cried, great and terrible God, who executest righteousness and judgment, thou surely givest thy people tears to drink in great measure; will thou cast them off forever? How long will thou be angry at the cry of the bondman? I thank God that this stain on our national honor is to be erased; that the nation, or rather the God of nations, is decreeing that no sinner, bloody with the guilt of human oppression, shall be unmolested; but if persisting in his purpose, shall feel the strong arm of the

law, and the stronger power of a public sentiment, which shall make his very name execrable in the view of every honest citizen. I thank God, to use the words of the immortal Webster, for the prospect that no more in any northern city "shall we hear the sound of the hammer, or see the smoke of the furnaces where manacles and chains are forged for human limbs." I praise God for the reason I have to hope that I have witnessed the last national public humiliation of a northern army sustained by northern sentiment, (yet under protest for virtue shocked and justice outraged,) in the rendering back to bondage a slave so fortunate as to escape. No more fugitive slave laws! Thank God that slavery is dead! It has been the source and fountain of barbarism, inhumanity, and irreligion. And to secure the wiping out of the last vestige of it there has been in the providence of God such a revelation of its true spirit and animus, as to create against it a unanimous public sentiment. God has permitted it to reach its culmination in the heaven-daring crime of taking the life of the head of the nation, thus thrusting the knife of the assassin at the heart of thirty millions of people.

I thank God for imparting to our soldiers the patience, fortitude, and self-sacrifice which have been necessary to ensure this victory. God put it into their hearts to leave homes of peace and luxury, and the embrace of dear ones, to sleep in the hard barrack, to tramp on the weary march, to lay in trenches beneath the peltings of the storm, to fall on the battle-field, to die a living death in prisons. These were men—noble, high-minded men. How insensible to hardship, how impervious to pain; how jubilant in suffering, singing even in the stern hour, hallelujahs, that they were worthy to suffer for their country. There is scarcely a household where there is not some one dead, and a light in a happy home gone out forever. But what comfort have weeping friends! Weep not for me! is the echo from the new-made grave; but for yourselves, that you have been but idle spectators in a struggle so fruitful in honor and glory. We died for the salvation of our native land—for the freedom of mankind. And when this nation shall come out of its stern disasters, regenerated and redeemed, it will be a consolation for you to know that you have given up so costly an offering for your

country's weal; and not only that, but a world's happiness. The gift of freedom is so great a blessing that hardly any sacrifice can be too great to achieve the inestimable treasure. We, the survivors of this contest, will hold in grateful remembrance all these toils, privations, dangers, and teach our children to reverence your memory as sacred. You shall live as long as the American Union shall stand, in the enduring characters which your deeds of self-denial and acts of self-forgetfulness have written on our hearts.

Again, I would thank God for the freedom of the white man, wrought out by the recent victories. Slavery, with that domineering spirit so peculiar to itself, has exercised such a tyranny over public opinion, that whosoever dare open his lips in disapprobation of it, must be straightway hung, drawn and quartered. And where it did not control State laws, by its threatening aspect, it so governed the sentiment of the nation, that a man's very bread depended on the silence he might maintain respecting this institution. The commerce of our Northern cities was largely interested in its gains. Our public men, dependant for promotion on the favor of the merchant princes, become eager compromisors between the conflicting interests. The press relying on public patronage was muzzled. Every pressure was brought to bear on the pulpit, through the threatened withdrawal of support, to give its solemn sanction to the iniquity and be false to its trust. Wherever a preacher was found bold enough to utter the thunders of God's violated law against the sin, he was accused of stepping out of his sphere and preaching politics. The right of the pulpit to apply the truths of the Gospel to the sphere of morality was stoutly denied. Christ, and him crucified, must be its only theme. In too many instances, it is to be feared, that the ministers of God quit their high station, and truckled to their vicious opinions. So debauched and vitiated had public sentiment become, that those who occupied the sacred desk, and were true to a high Christian morality, found no response in the pews; but a hearty and indignant dissent.

This withholding of unshaken moral convictions on the part of the ministry, sapped the very foundation of manly character

and made them the mere tools of their congregation. And when a man's manhood has gone, he might as well be under the sod as above it. I thank God that this victory of freedom over slavery has given freedom to the white man. Men will not pray and speak hereafter, with studied circumlocution, watching well the door of their lips lest a word about the rights of the slave should be hinted at. And not only will speakers be true to their nation and their God, but the people will appreciate their sentiments of justice, humanity and religion. Thank God for a regenerated pulpit. Its eloquence and strength is in its independence. My tone thus far has been one of rejoicing.

So rapid is the succession of public events, that a proclamation for a fast, dated three weeks before its observance, loses very much of its pertinency, because before we fasted and humbled ourselves, God heard our prayers. If it be said that we need a fast to prepare us for the great and solemn duties before us, it is well said. But a true fast implies thankfulness, and thankfulness, penitence. The goodness of God is the most powerful influence, leading men to repentance. For this reason, my friends, I have adopted the jubilant strain that I have. But I could not fail to notice, that the cup of rejoicing is mingled with drops of sorrow. And not a note of gladness that swells the heart to-day will there be, which will not be chastened with a strain of sadness. The President of our republic is no more! He, on whom we leaned to guide our ship of State, over swelling billows of adversity, to the port of rest and security, has gone down to his grave, and he shall never return to us. Having escaped the rocks and quicksands of the troublous ocean, as a nation, through his guiding hand under Divine Providence, and just in full view of the haven, and tuning our lips to sing—safe, safe at last, our pilot while at the helm is dislodged from his position by a topmost wave, higher than any before, and he is engulphed in the dark waters. We trusted in him as the only one who could redeem our beloved nation. He had always done the right thing, in just the right time. A people before jubilant and exultant with heart and tongue, filled with rejoicing, sink to a depression of spirits as correspondingly low as their previous hopefulness had

made them confident. But in this affliction we may rejoice. We are commanded to rejoice in tribulation. God is nearer to a nation in trial's hour, than at any other time. It is then he clothes them with garments of praise. Even now, we seem to get a glimpse of God's merciful designs—a little light behind the cloud—giving reason to us to be thankful to the Lord God, and bless his name. Though apparently our dangers were past, as a nation, in reality they were just at hand. There was a wisdom, firmness, and courage to be displayed in the reconstruction of our national Union, which even the stern necessities of war have not demanded. Though Mr. Lincoln, thus far, as our leader, had performed his part admirably, it may, with somewhat of reason, be questioned whether he would have been equal to future emergencies; and if unequal, may not his departure have been in mercy to himself, and for the redemption of a nation. The care of his position had already made his life a personal burden, and he longed to fly away and be at rest. He had a presentiment that he should not outlive the rebellion; but for the nation's sake he desired to assume for the second time, the high trust of leadership of the American people. He stands now on the heights of glory and honor above, amid the effulgence of eternal day. No sound shall awake him to glory again. There the wicked cease from troubling, and the haggard and care-worn are at rest. No venomous tongue of slander shall reach him there. His kind heart, we have reason to believe, would have led him to err on the side of magnanimity, in his future policy as an executive, and that element of character for which we honor him as an individual, might have proved the nation's weakness. At any rate, I believe that God has taken him away, and he has done it for his good, and the good of the nation. Though personally, I feel that I have lost a friend, the nation a father, and the oppressed a benefactor, yet will I rejoice in God to-day.

And yet again, we may congratulate ourselves on the probable future of our country. The sun of liberty is to rise upon us, and never set. Our people have risen in their great might and their chains have dropped off. States belligerent and discordant are to be at peace. Physically, face to face, as we

have always been, lake linking lake, and ocean, ocean, we are now to be united in a more intimate relation than those of geographical bonds. We are to be united heart to heart, and hand to hand, as never before, America's noble band of brothers. The wastes of war shall be repaired; white-winged commerce shall float over every sea, without any to dispute its sway; the husbandman shall sit under his own vine and fig tree, reaping the full fruit of his toil; the mechanic lay aside his musket and sword, and hie to his busy workshop, and task his genius to save men's lives rather than to destroy them; the lawyer everywhere plead for the things that are just and equal; the physician minister only to those who go down gently into the dark valley; the man of God plead with hearts unsullied by the vices of the camp. I see fields of smiling harvests, bending under the reaper's hand, every mart of business filled with traffic, the thronging crowds of men, pressed with remunerative work, homes of beauty and luxury everywhere dotting the horizon, our oxen strong to labor, no breaking in, or going out, no complaining in our streets. But a far happier sight than this I see. It is brothers fighting again, yes, fighting again—do not fear what I may say—fighting not with sword, but with the pen winning victory. Yes, all alike inspired with the love of liberty, and battling for it with the tongue.

Trusting in the God of might,
Turning not their backs for flight,
But, soldiers for the right
    Facing the coward foe.
Hurling error from its throne,
Truth's bright banner waving o'er them;
Putting ignorance to shame,
Striving with a heaven-ward aim
    For the good of man.

Our sons North, South, East and West, grown up as plants; our daughters, as corner stones polished after the similitude of a palace. I see the nation arise from its baptism of blood, clothed in the garments of a regenerated humanity. I see the oppressed and down-trodden of all nations, crowding their temple gates of liberty; or else lighting their torch at our lamp. My soul kindles with rapture at the sight. I see all mankind

debtors to us, and with joyful acclaim greeting us. I see that flag, that dear old flag, standing in mid-heavens, pure and serene, unstained by bloody scars, "stripes and bars," bearing justice as its symbol, binding no man in chains, rising higher and higher, over hill and vale, waving the motto of the free, Union and Liberty. Gird you, christian men and women, that you may be counted worthy of such a citizenship. Be much in prayer; rejoice, with trust in God; be thankful unto him and bless his name. With four millions of brothers added to our number, let us rally round the flag once again, shouting the battle cry of civilization, humanity and religion.

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